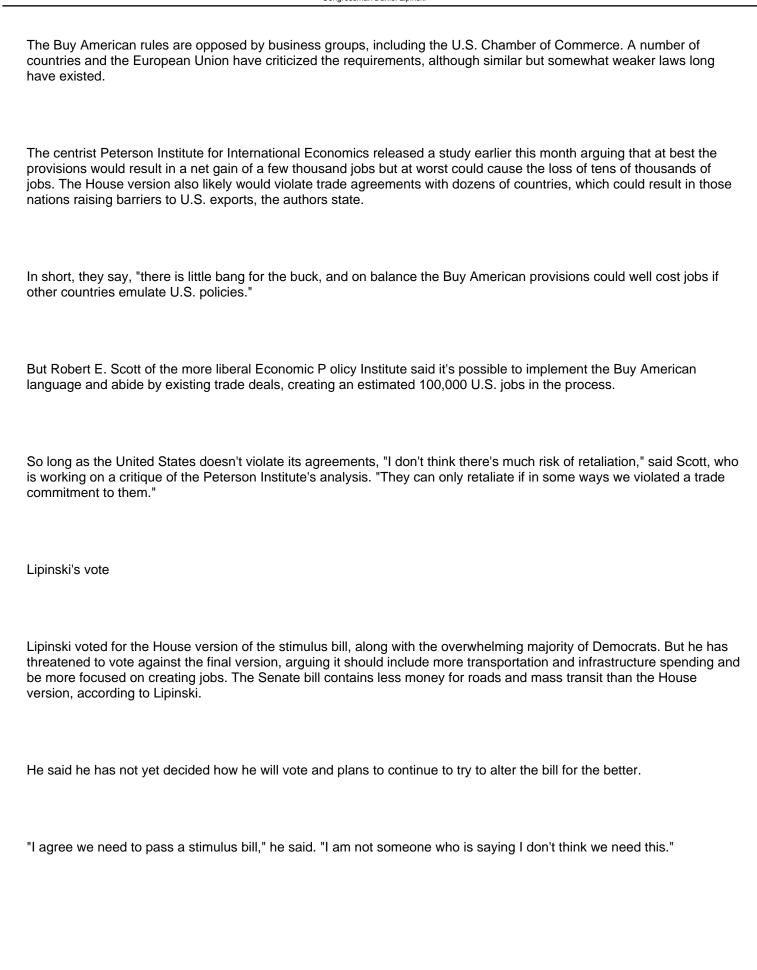
(February 11, 2009) 'Buy American' holds up in stimulus - for now

BY NATHANIEL ZIMMER Staff Writer
http://www.southtownstar.com/news/1423861,021109stimulus.article
Despite President Barack Obama's stated concerns and the opposition of business groups and free-trade proponents, the version of the stimulus bill the Senate passed Tuesday requires the government to "Buy American" when spending money under the measure.
By a large margin, the Senate rejected an amendment by Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) to strip the provision from the bil last week. It adopted language requiring Buy American rules to be applied in a manner that doesn't violate international trade agreements.
In prime-time interviews a week ago, Obama said Congress needs to make sure the rules won't "trigger a trade war." However, he stopped short of calling for removal of the provision, which includes various loopholes but requires the government when it decides not to comply to state publicly its reasons for doing so.
House and Senate negotiators now must reconcile differences between the two bills. The Senate version covers iron, steel and manufactured goods used in public works projects.
Locally, U.S. Rep. Dan Lipinski (D-3rd) is a strong proponent of Buy American rules and a free-trade critic. He argues more should be done to guarantee stimulus money is spent on a wide array of U.S. products, although it appears Congress is unlikely to go any further than it already has. And he's not softening his stance in the face of the president statements, which he said he was "disappointed with."
"I'm not a rubber stamp for President Obama," he said. "I want to support the president, but first and foremost I want to do what is right."
As a result of free-trade agreements signed over the past 15 years, "We have seen our trade deficit balloon more and more, and we lose more and more American jobs," Lipinski said.
Mixed reviews

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